

Bye-bye Botox?

Rebecca Cripps tries a hands-on therapy that promises to take years off her face

I HATE MY FROWN LINES. I hate them more than inflation or cockroaches. But I can't bring myself to have Botox. The idea of having poison injected into my face simply seems too sinister. Yes, I want to look good, but I also want to feel good. I want my skin to glow youthfully and I want the glow to be genuine. Is that too much to ask?

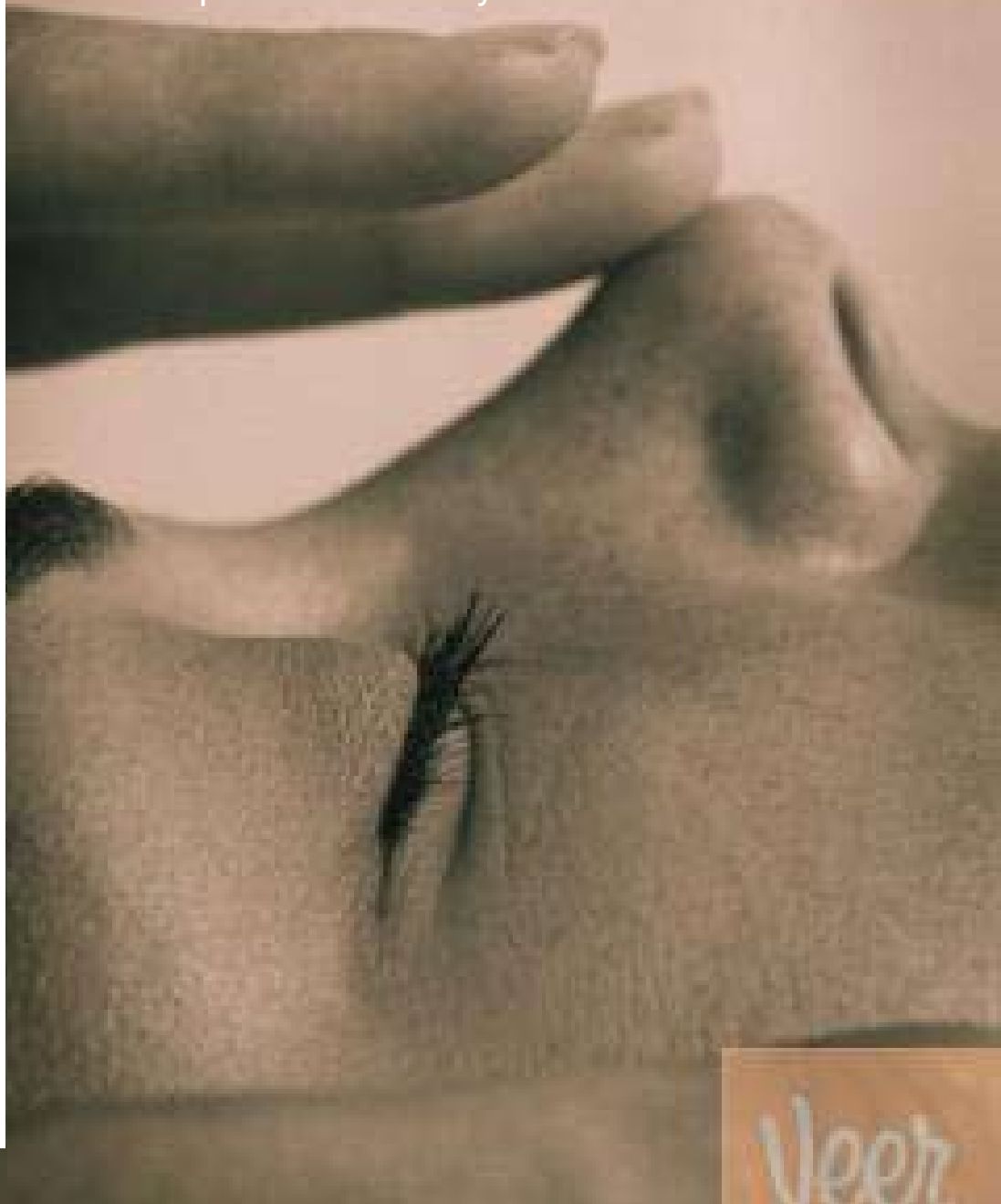
Figuring that the inside counts more than the outside, I book a health treatment. Reflexology is the polar opposite of Botox: non-invasive, rooted in ancient traditional medicine and as far south of my forehead as it's bodily possible to get. It is a deeply relaxing experience that invigorates me for days. This is how I want to feel. Except that my frown lines are still bugging me.

The woman massaging my feet suggests face reflexology, which offers the benefits of foot reflexology with an added beauty bonus. So while it rebalances the body's chemistry and increases lymphatic drainage, it also stimulates the facial nerves, muscles and circulation, encouraging the build-up of new skin tissue and improved muscle tone.

A workout for my face! Beneficial for my body! I feel excited for half a minute and then reality bites. If it's so great, why isn't everyone doing it? Pull the other one, lady, it's got bells on.

Still, after catching sight of deep monkey-like creases around my mouth in a department-store window, I'll try anything that's not toxic or bloody. I search online for a practitioner. Only a handful exist in this country; trained face reflexologists are few and far between, it seems. This fuels my suspicions. Is it a proper discipline? Does it really work?

A therapist, Rupert French, comes to my house, bringing his own massage table. Initially, I am worried about having a ▷



‘I notice the difference the moment I sit up – my face feels years younger, taut and glowing. I can definitely sense a change’

man touching my face, but his manner is gentle, efficient and professional. He takes my medical history and I mention that I suffer from hormonal highs and lows, which he seems to think he can help to relieve. This prompts me to mention mild digestive problems, too, but I also confess my doubts. Where’s the proof that face reflexology works?

He says that most of the evidence is anecdotal, because so far no one has funded extensive clinical trials. If foot reflexology worked for me, he adds, then it’s likely that I’ll respond to face reflexology. Let’s try it and see.

As for the theory, he explains that it combines traditional Oriental acupressure, Egyptian reflexology, South American Mapuche Indian diagnostic methods, Vietnamese nerve points that relate to parts of the body and modern neuroanatomy.

‘Mumbo jumbo!’ I laugh, secretly impressed.

‘That’s for you to decide’, he says, unperturbed.

Developed by alternative health practitioner Lone Sorensen more than 25 years ago, face reflexology is designed to identify the underlying cause of health imbalances, address their symptoms and promote healing. It has been used to treat conditions from insomnia and stress to hormone problems, but most people simply enjoy its relaxing, revitalising effects.

Can I lie down now? I’m curious. I don’t want to wait a moment longer.

After a quick rosewater cleanse, Rupert applies a tiny amount of Argentinian rose mosqueta oil, which is packed with vitamin C and acts as a suppleness booster. Next, he gently massages the acupuncture points on my face, using the tips of his fingers to make small circular motions. How can anything so gentle have an effect?

Suddenly I feel a bit tearful and realise that something is happening. But the emotional phase quickly

passes and I start to relax into it.

A pressure point under my eye feels slightly painful. ‘What’s that?’ I ask. He tells me that it relates to the stomach.

Using slow, investigative strokes, he feels for differences in texture under the skin, which indicate the parts of the body that are most out of synch. Hey presto, he finds that the facial reflex areas with the largest subcutaneous deposits correspond with my stomach and pancreas. He goes to work on them with increased speed and intensity in order to address the imbalances.

He also works my endocrine system to help alleviate the hormonal problems I told him about. To end the treatment, he massages my face with a slow, rhythmic motion that is incredibly soothing and relaxing.

Despite myself, I’m beginning to believe. Yet I’m unprepared for how transforming 45 minutes of facial manipulation can be. I notice the difference the moment I sit up – my face feels years younger, taut and glowing. My hands fly to my cheeks. It’s hard to believe, but I can definitely sense a change. For the first time in ages, I feel radiant.

Unusually, I don’t look in the mirror before going out. My frown lines don’t matter so much any more. I skip along the street to my friend’s house, feeling happy and uplifted.

The effects last for days. Two weeks later, I have another treatment to prove that the first wasn’t a fluke. My complexion goes on glowing and I feel far more robust. Coincidence? It’s hard to tell. Proof? It’s circumstantial. More? Yes, please. □

Rupert French (07779 789939; www.mindbodysole.info).

For more information on facial reflexology and practitioners in your area try the following links: www.facialreflexology.org.uk www.globalfacial.com.

MINI MASTERCLASS

Weight-loss Pilates



SPINE CURLS FOR TUMMY AND BOTTOM

In the second part of our Pilates programme, Lynne Robinson explains: ‘We are targeting the fleshy bit of your buttocks just below your sitting bones. The outer thighs will work, too, as you press outwards.’

■ You will need a stretchy scarf or stretch band.

1 Lie in the relaxation position (see last month’s lesson). Check that your feet are parallel with your hips and about 30cm from your buttocks. Now tie the scarf securely around your thighs, keeping the legs hip-distance apart. Place your arms by your sides, palms down. Breathe in wide to the ribcage.

2 Breathe out, ‘wind zip’ (see October 2008) gently and, staying zipped throughout, press gently outwards against the scarf and curl the tailbone off the floor just a little.

3 Breathe in, and slowly curl back down to the neutral pelvis position, lengthening out the spine.

4 Breathe out, still zipping, and peel more of the spine off the floor – really try to open the base of the spine.

5 Breathe in, then breathe out as you roll the spine down, bone by bone, keeping pressure on the scarf.

Repeat five more spine curls, bringing more of the spine off the floor each time, but keeping the shoulder blades down on the mat.



Watchpoints

- Lengthen through the knees as you curl up.
- Do not arch the back.
- Keep the weight even on both feet and try not to let the feet roll in or out.
- Keep lengthening the upper body too; think long from the back of the ribcage up through the crown of the head.

NEXT MONTH Curl ups with toe dips to flatten the tum

Sainsbury’s Magazine readers can buy Lynne Robinson’s Pilates for Weight Loss (Kyle Cathie, £12.99) for £9.99 including free p&p (UK mainland only). To order, call 020 7692 7215, quoting KCPWL/Sainsbury’s.